

# Easter Reflection

04/17/2023



## ***The Risen Christ Calls Us to a New Future of Truth, Justice and Human Flourishing for All***

Dear Friends,

In this Easter season, we live again the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus. We have heard the story over and over, and yet each year as it is presented once more we are invited to immerse ourselves in it. Will our experience of the story be the same for us as it was in previous years? Or will we be able to hear it with new insights and creative engagements?

The power of the Gospel is that the Word of God is spoken to us individually and as a community. The Word can fall on deaf ears, or it can take roots, grow and bear fruit in hearts made ready by longing for what God can give.

At this time in 2023 there is another challenge that we must all face, one that concerns the very fabric of Australian society. In a true sense, it is another word which we are called to listen to. We are asked to listen to people whose unique place in Australian society needs to be acknowledged by the nation.

The First Peoples of this land have presented an invitation to the whole of Australia to walk with them in a spirit of justice and truth. In the Uluru Statement from the Heart, they express anguish at their history of dispossession in the land they love so much. They ask that their story be told truthfully, and that their Voice be heard.

The Australian people now have the responsibility to make a decision. Will the Voice of the First Peoples be given its place in the Constitution of the nation? Are we able to welcome a Voice that has not been heard? Can we open ourselves to the reflection, the advice, the wisdom of our First Peoples? We are able to trust our elected representatives to legislate for defence, health, education and finance, so can we trust them to legislate for the administration of the Voice?

Over two hundred years have passed since non-indigenous Australians also made their home in Australia. I came here as a migrant from a war-torn country, and like so many others have benefitted from this land. Vietnam, my home, my birthplace, has experienced so much conflict and violence. My family escaped from North Vietnam in the 1950s and so the effects of dislocation and trauma were very real to us. When again faced with the need to escape in the late 1970s we joined many others who arrived in Australia as impoverished asylum-seekers. I can

grieve for the death and destruction my people suffered. The history is written, shared, and mourned. Even here in my adopted home Australia the story of the Vietnamese people is told and its torment acknowledged.

It pains me that my situation is compared to that of my brothers and sisters whose people have lived here for 60,000 years. My presence here has brought me safety, growth and opportunity; while their presence here has meant for them dispossession, sorrow and intergenerational disadvantage. As Chair for the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service I am privileged to hear voices from the margins of society and from across our nation. I am attuned to our First Nations people, especially from regional and remote Australia calling on us to stand with them as they work to bring about a Voice to Parliament.

50 years ago in February our Catholic Church heard the voice of our First Nations people in our liturgy for the very first time. The 40th International Eucharistic Congress in Melbourne brought a very large number of Aboriginal people together, including from the Kimberley region of Western Australia and remote communities from the Northern Territory. The recent Plenary Council of the Australian Church affirmed this with a decree encouraging parishes to embrace symbols and rituals that will enrich our celebration. The Council also decreed that the Catholic Church in Australia, “endorses the Uluru Statement from the Heart and encourages engagement with process for implementing the statement including local, regional and national truth-telling efforts.”

As a Church we have a long way to go in bringing about healing and owning the truth of our shared past. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) is a gift to the whole Australian Church and guides us in ways in which we can better bring about justice and healing for all Australians. On the 26th January 2022 NATSICC called on all members of the Australian Catholic Church to support the Uluru Statement from the Heart. This is a generous invitation to come together and build a better future for all.

Pope Francis has called for the inclusion of input from indigenous people and displaced ethnic groups into the political processes. “Representative bodies are inconceivable when only the dominant power occupies spaces,” he said, suggesting the need to establish a quota system that “reintegrates” historically marginalized groups “into the decision-making space that has been taken away from them.” (National Catholic Reporter)

As we face Good Friday and Easter Sunday once again we are presented with the “Lamb standing as having been slain” (Rev: 5:6). The Lamb communicates to us the essence of the message of Jesus, the Word of God, as throughout the Bible there is an unmistakable journey towards nonviolence, culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The image of the Lamb is that of the nonviolent victim of violence. Here we see all the suffering ones of this world – abandoned people, refugees, and asylum seekers, those suffering in war, abused children, and those whom society treats as nothing. And in the Australian First Peoples, we also detect that compelling image of the Lamb.

Australians can be proud that our First Peoples have presented a request to be heard through a Constitutional Voice. A more civilised and gracious response to a history littered with violence is hard to imagine. What a remarkable opportunity Australians have been given to forge greater unity in our nation. Have we the courage to face our First Nations peoples and assure them that they are loved?

At the heart of the Easter message is the summons to a new future against the background of entrenched hopelessness. As with Mary and the disciples, who were emboldened to move from the shadows of crucifixion into the light of the resurrection, let us as the living Body of Christ have the courage to be a pioneer leading humanity to new dawn of greater justice, equality and fraternity.

– *Bishop Vincent Long*